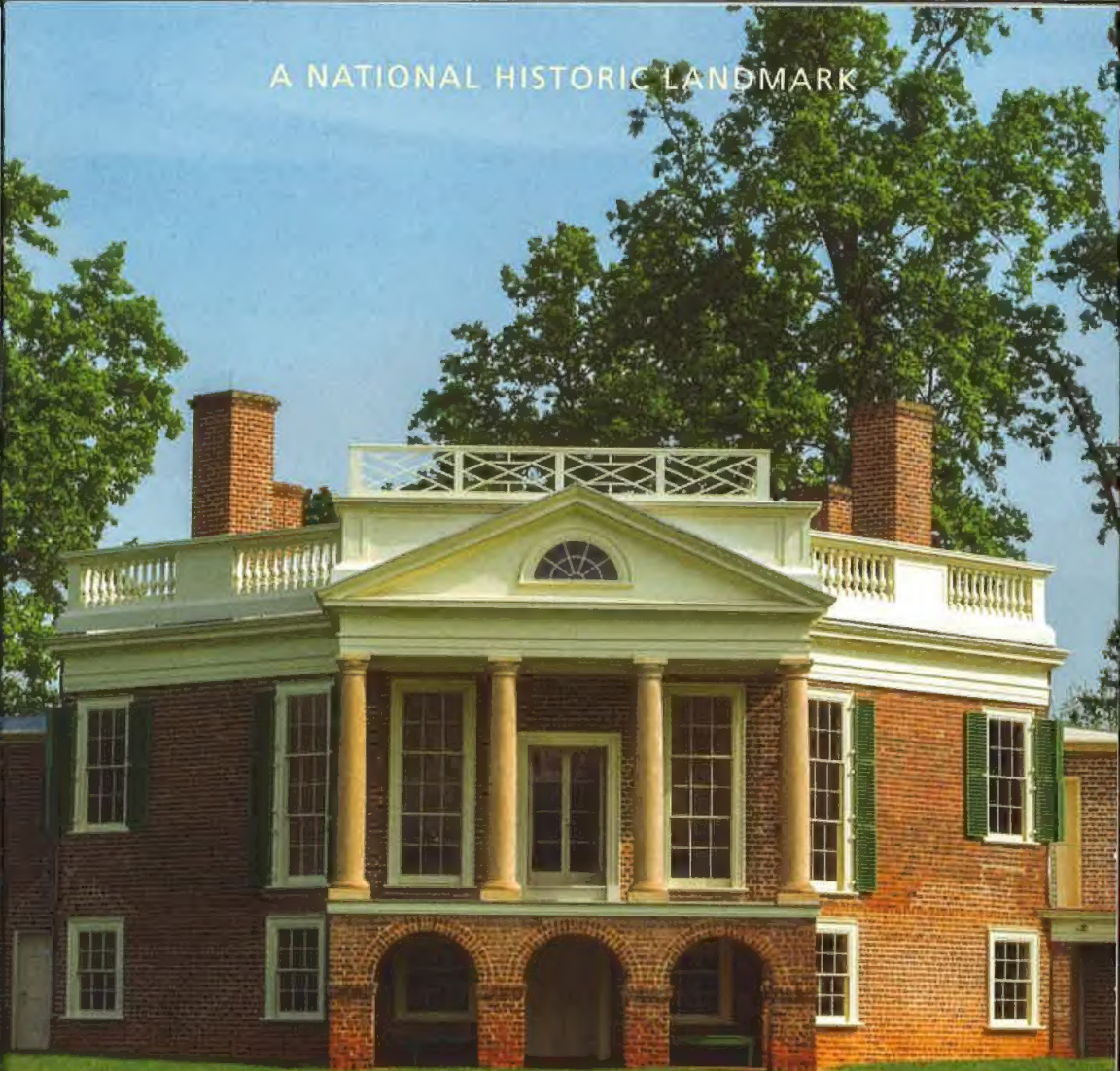


A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK



# Visitor Guide



THOMAS JEFFERSON'S

*Poplar Forest*





*"I have fixed myself  
comfortably, keep some  
books here, bring others  
occasionally, am in the  
solitude of a hermit, and  
quite at leisure to attend  
to my absent friends."*

**Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Rush**  
August 17, 1811





**T**homas Jefferson and his wife, Martha, inherited the Bedford County plantation known as Poplar Forest from her father in 1773. The property's name, which predates Jefferson's ownership, reflects the forest that once grew here. Several stately poplars in front of the home still welcome visitors.

The 4,819-acre plantation provided Jefferson with significant income and the perfect setting where he could pursue his passion for reading, writing, studying and gardening after retiring from public life.

In the early years of his ownership, Jefferson managed Poplar Forest from afar as he practiced law and served in a series of government offices at both the state and national levels. He and his family, however, did spend two months here in 1781 when they left Monticello to elude British capture. During this visit, Jefferson compiled much of the material for his book—*Notes on the State of Virginia*—while he was probably staying at the overseer's house.

In 1806, Jefferson traveled from Washington to supervise the laying of the foundation for the octagonal

house we see today. When his presidency ended in 1809, Jefferson visited the retreat three to four times per year, staying from two weeks to two months. His visits often coincided with the seasonal responsibilities of the working plantation. He also oversaw the ornamentation of the house and grounds, and the planting of his vegetable garden. Family members, usually grandchildren, often joined Jefferson.

Jefferson made his last trip to Poplar Forest in 1823 when he settled his grandson, Francis Eppes, on the property. Ill health prevented further visits. In 1828, two years after Jefferson's death at age 83, Eppes sold Poplar Forest to a neighbor. The property was privately owned until December 1983 when a nonprofit corporation began the rescue of the landmark for future generations.



Jefferson kept approximately 1,000 books at Poplar Forest of which about one third were in the smallest size available (petit format). Jefferson read in six languages, including original Greek and Latin.

Jefferson wrote letters from the White House directing construction at Poplar Forest. A polygraph machine made a copy of nearly every letter he wrote, providing valuable information to historians.







The amount of glass, the quality of light and the way the house connects to the surrounding landscape were strikingly modern for Jefferson's time and clearly express the fundamental idea that house and grounds should be joined into a seamless whole.



- 1 North Portico (entrance)
- 2 Northeast Room
- 3 Northwest Room
- 4 Dining Room
- 5 West Bedroom (Jefferson's)
- 6 West Stairway Pavilion
- 7 Parlor
- 8 South Portico
- 9 East Bedroom
- 10 East Stairway Pavilion





## Architecture

Jefferson owned several plantations, but designed and built elaborate houses for himself at only Monticello and Poplar Forest. In 1806, he began construction on the first octagonal house in America—the centerpiece of his intricate villa design at Poplar Forest.

The country villa dates to Roman times; it is an ideal home designed for an owner's enjoyment in a rural setting. Jefferson learned about villas from his extensive reading of classical literature. He had attempted to create retreats in his younger years, and finally achieved his private masterpiece at his isolated Bedford County retreat.

At Poplar Forest, Jefferson melded both new and ancient, as well as European and American, design elements that he had studied in his years of travel abroad. The 16th century Italian architect Andrea Palladio greatly influenced Jefferson's plan for the revival of ancient Roman architecture and integration of landscape design into the architectural design. Jefferson also incorporated what he saw when he lived in Paris, such as floor-to-ceiling windows, alcove beds, skylights and indoor toilets. From his earliest use of

architectural handbooks, Jefferson became fascinated with octagons because of their symmetry and the light and airy environments they created. Although he included them in many designs, the house at Poplar Forest is the only octagonal structure that Jefferson constructed.

In 1814, Jefferson added a one-hundred-foot-long "wing of offices," which included a kitchen, a smokehouse, one room likely used as a cook's room and laundry, and a storage room. Its innovative flat roof, called a terras roof, also served a recreational purpose: "About twilight of the evening, we sally out with the owls and bats and take our evening exercise on the terras."

In 1845 a fire led the family then living at Poplar Forest to convert Jefferson's villa into a practical farmhouse. Visitors today see the house as preservation, reconstruction and restoration are in progress.

Poplar Forest is highly idealistic in concept, with only a few concessions to practicality—it was so perfectly suited to Jefferson alone that subsequent owners found it difficult to inhabit and altered it to suit their needs.



*"When finished, it will be the best dwelling house in the state, except that of Monticello; perhaps preferable to that, as more proportioned to the faculties of a private citizen."*

**Thomas Jefferson  
to J. W. Eppes  
September 18, 1812**

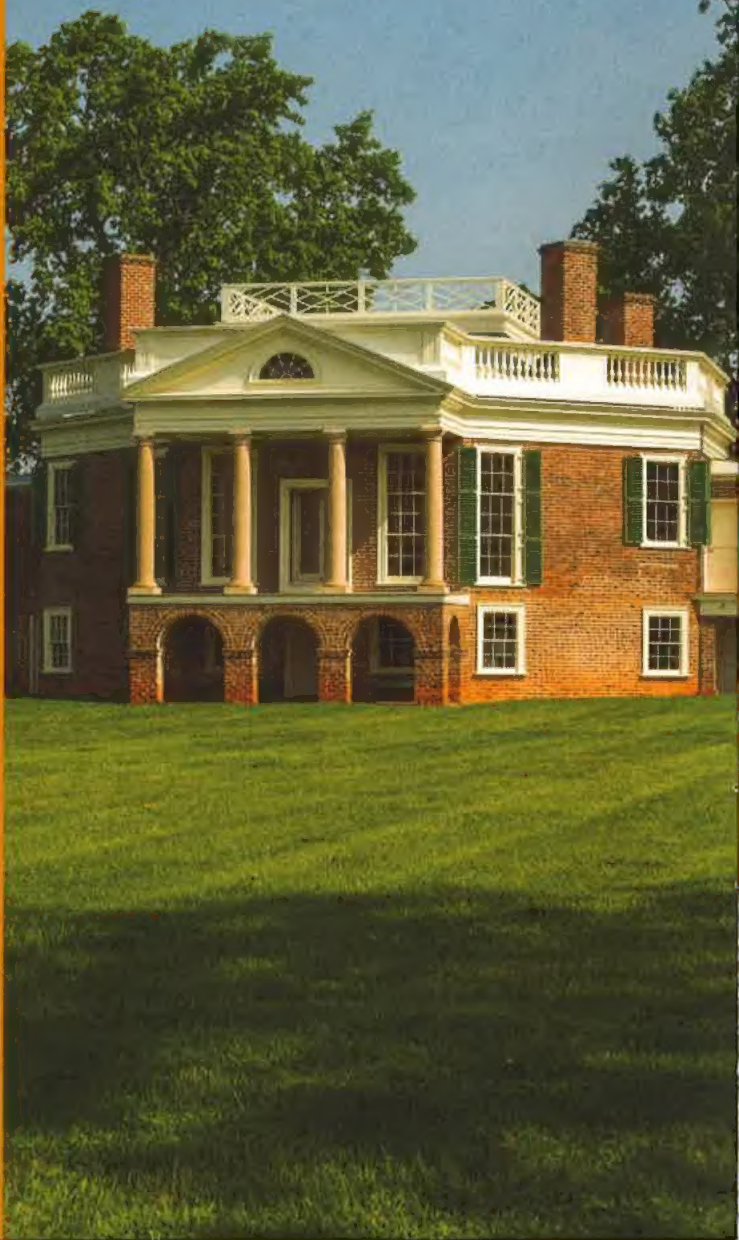




On a summer's day in 1811,  
Jefferson wrote from  
Poplar Forest to his friend  
Charles Willson Peale:

*"No occupation is so delightful to  
me as the culture of the earth, and  
no culture comparable to that of a  
garden...But tho an old man, I am  
but a young gardener."*

In Europe, Jefferson  
saw mounds placed  
away from the houses  
to serve as vantage  
points for surveying  
ornamental grounds.  
Here, Jefferson placed  
his mounds close to  
the house, planted  
them with circles of  
aspens and willows,  
and used them to  
create a symmetrical  
landscape plan.





## Landscape

Thomas Jefferson was a skilled landscape designer, blending architecture and garden elements into a seamless composition. Many of Jefferson's original plantings are gone today but archaeological research has begun to unearth the information needed to begin restoring the landscape.

Encircling the ornamental grounds near the house, Jefferson laid a road "540 yds round" and lined it with paper mulberry trees. Inspired by visits to French and English gardens, Jefferson incorporated tree clumps, oval shrub beds and earthen mounds into his planting scheme.

Archaeological investigations of the north clumps showed they each contained 12 trees composed of balsam, tulip and Athenian poplar, sweet shrub, redbud, common and Kentucky locust, and dogwood. The oval beds contained dwarf roses, large roses and shrubs of prickly locust. In all, Jefferson interspersed at least 14 species of trees throughout the grounds. Plantings lined the banks of the sunken

lawn. Archaeological excavation suggests that in Jefferson's time, the sunken lawn did not form the rectangle that it does today. Instead, the east bank angled out, while the west berm apparently ran straight out from the house. Laboratory analysis of pollen and phytoliths—the silica remains of plants—provides clues to what plants lined the banks.

The landscaped grounds sat within a 61-acre enclosure that Jefferson referred to as the "curtilage," which may have featured orchards, gardens and support buildings. The curtilage provided a transition from the ornamental landscape to the farm.



*"I have engaged a workman to build offices, have laid off a handsome curtilage connecting the house with the Tomahawk, have inclosed and divided it into suitable appendages to a Dwelling house, and have begun its improvement by planting trees of use and ornament."*

**Thomas Jefferson to J. W. Eppes**

April 18, 1813

### Curtilage:

...the enclosed area of land around a dwelling, harbors the intimate activity associated with the sanctity of a man's home and the privacies of life. —*Black's Law Dictionary*









## WALKING TOUR

- 1** Main House
- 2** 1814 "Wing of Offices"
- 3** Necessaries or Privies
- 4** Mounds
- 5** South Lawn
- 6** Paper Mulberry Trees
- 7** Carriage Turnaround
- 8** Oval Bed & Tree Clump
- 9** Tulip Poplar Trees
- 10** Historic Circular Road
- 11** Blue Ridge Mountains
- 12** Fields
- 13** Curtilage Fence
- 14** Slave Quarter Exhibit
- 15** Modern Entrance Road
- 16** Exit

## POST-JEFFERSON STRUCTURES

- 17** 19th Century Tenant Houses (Offices)
- 18** The Rightmire Preservation Center
- 19** Williams Archaeology Lab & Exhibits
- 20** Museum Shop & Restrooms
- 21** Pavilion
- 22** House Tour Begins Here (Orientation Building)



## Slavery at Poplar Forest, 1773–1826



Some enslaved men and women lived where they worked. Hannah, Jefferson's cook and housekeeper, most likely lived in the room next to the kitchen (depicted above). The kitchen at Poplar Forest was designed with three stew stoves for French cooking and a set kettle for instant hot water, making it very modern for the time.

Skilled and unskilled laborers and managers, both enslaved and free, lived at Poplar Forest. In early 1774, Jefferson recorded the names of 11 enslaved African Americans residing on the plantation. During his residency from 1806 to 1823, this community ranged from 60–100 people.

Thomas Jefferson inherited from his father-in-law, John Wayles, many of the slaves who came to live at Poplar Forest. He sometimes purchased, and sometimes sold, individuals to reunite families. He sold others to pay debts or as punishment.

Jefferson encouraged hard work through incentives and paid slaves for jobs that he considered beyond their normal workload. He reserved harsh punishment for runaways and acts of rebellion.

Overseers lived on site to manage the plantation. Jefferson gave them a salary, a share of the crop and a house. Sometimes enslaved men supervised other slaves as part of the management system.

Slaves grew crops including tobacco, corn and wheat. Some foodstuffs, like peaches and butter, and livestock were raised at Poplar Forest and sent to Monticello. Crops to be sold were sent down the James River from Lynchburg to Richmond.







## DAILY WORK

Enslaved men and women at Poplar Forest performed a variety of jobs, including field work, road building, livestock tending, brickmaking, blacksmithing, woodworking, carpentry, masonry, weaving, spinning and domestic service.

Elderly people tended to young children. Older children assisted in weeding, planting seeds and gathering wheat. Jefferson sent some boys and girls between the ages of 10 and 16 to Monticello to learn a trade. By 1819, 94 people lived in bondage at Poplar Forest, of which nearly one half were children.

Free and enslaved artisans combined their skills to construct the house. Many workmen had long associations with Jefferson and helped build Poplar Forest, Monticello and the University of Virginia. Brick masons, carpenters, joiners and plasterers added finishing touches to the house at Poplar Forest until Jefferson's death in 1826.

## LIFE AT POPLAR FOREST

Archaeological research has revealed the size, materials and layout of slave cabins and yards, the types of belongings people owned, the foods they ate and what they did at home. Excavations hint at their participation in the local economy, their creation of privacy and their view of the world around them.

Slave marriages, although not legally recognized, promoted stable family life. By the 1820s, members of seven extended families lived at Poplar Forest.

Poplar Forest slaves had some control over their private lives. They lived in settlements called quarters scattered across the plantation, convenient to workplaces. Cabins were crowded and dark, and many daily activities took place outdoors.

Although slaves received rations of food and cloth, archaeological evidence shows they supplemented these allotments by raising poultry, hunting, gathering, and growing or buying goods. While slaves' workdays were closely supervised, their evenings and Sundays were open for some of these tasks. Some people also traveled off the plantation to visit family, attend church or visit local stores and markets.

During the 53 years that Jefferson owned Poplar Forest many slaves were born and died on the property. Their burial sites are now unknown. Some who survived Jefferson were given to his heirs; most were auctioned off and left the plantation.

Archaeologists unearth evidence that provides an intimate look at the plantation community that lived and worked at Poplar Forest. As the investigation continues, the full story of Poplar Forest will be revealed.



# Slavery at Poplar Forest, 1828–1865

In 1828, William Cobbs bought about 1,000 acres at Poplar Forest and moved his family and slaves here. By the 1840s, son-in-law Edward Hutter managed the farm and acquired slaves of his own.



Enslaved people living at Poplar Forest likely purchased or bartered at local stores for these buttons and other items of personal adornment. The above artifacts date from 1840–1865 while those below were used at Poplar Forest between 1790–1812.



Men and women served as field hands, domestic servants and craftsmen as in earlier times, but life differed in important ways. As fewer people were needed to work the land, Cobbs and Hutter leased men and women to local planters and businesses. By 1854, nearly half of all working adults were leased. Slaves who remained on the property were more intensely supervised by resident owners. Broader restrictions placed on slaves throughout the South at this time also resulted in less autonomy.

Slaves had limited economic opportunities. Edward Hutter

allotted land to them for gardens. They likely grew vegetables and fruits for themselves, as well as corn and oats for sale locally.

During this period, some Poplar Forest slaves participated in church-sponsored weddings and funerals. Religious communities often included both enslaved and free Virginians.

In June 1864, federal troops raided Liberty (now Bedford). Thirty-eight of the 48 enslaved people living at Poplar Forest left with them. Those who chose to remain became free by December of 1865.

Archaeologists have excavated quarter sites from three different time periods east of the octagonal house. At one site, they found evidence of three cabins, the largest measuring 25' x 15'. These cabins faced away from the overseer's house, allowing some privacy. Remains of tools, handmade pipes, beads, coins, padlocks and keys suggest the types of activities that enslaved workers engaged in at home.







## Slavery and Thomas Jefferson

When Thomas Jefferson was born, slavery had existed in Virginia for nearly 75 years. He grew up on a plantation with enslaved workers and, as an adult, owned nearly 200 slaves.

Jefferson's views on slavery and blacks are complex. At one time he thought blacks were naturally inferior to other races, but later conceded that servitude may have had an impact on their abilities. As a young Virginia legislator, he unsuccessfully advocated allowing private citizens to free their slaves. Later he introduced a bill barring free blacks from staying in the state. His original draft of the Declaration of Independence included strong language opposing the transatlantic slave trade. As president, he signed a bill outlawing that trade.

Jefferson recognized the evils of slavery, but he remained tied to the system and freed only seven of his bondsmen, all skilled members of the Hemmings family at Monticello. His concerns about emancipation ranged from paternalistic to self-interest. He believed most former slaves couldn't survive on their own. He also feared for his own economic survival and the safety of whites at the mercy of former slaves who had, in his words, been subjected to "unremitting despotism" and "degrading submissions." As an older man, he advocated freeing and returning slaves to Africa.

*Jefferson's life and words reflect the moral contradictions and practical concerns facing the architects of the new democracy that extolled freedom and equality:*

*"We have the wolf by the ear, and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go. Justice is in one scale, and self-preservation in the other."*

*"Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep forever..."*

Most slave housing at Poplar Forest was of log construction with wooden chimneys. Many of these houses were single rooms with dirt floors. Slaves often dug storage pits directly into these floors to store food or personal belongings. By the late 1850s, some slaves lived in a two-story, brick duplex.

A "ghost structure" (right) erected at Poplar Forest shows the dimensions and location of a duplex slave structure that housed two families, dating from 1790 to 1812.



Documents and archaeological findings reveal most of what is known about Poplar Forest slaves, who left few written records of their own. Accounts of members of the Hubbard family contain glimpses into the slaves' private world.

#### JAMES HUBBARD (JAME)

Owners often named newly arrived Africans, but enslaved parents named their children. Family names were often passed down from generation to generation. Biblical names, like Hannah, Solomon and Rachael were favorites at Poplar Forest.

A few surnames survive in Jefferson's records, including Hemmings, Hix and Hubbard. Jefferson often used nicknames when referring to individuals or distinguished between people by combining their mother's or father's name, or their occupation, home farm or former residence with their name—as in Dinah's Lucy, Will Smith and Bedford John.

James Hubbard, at age 30, became Thomas Jefferson's property and moved to Monticello. Hubbard worked as a waterman, carrying goods to market and returning with plantation supplies. His work subjected him to only loose supervision, and enabled him to visit family and friends as he navigated rivers between Charlottesville and Richmond.

Hubbard became foster father to three young children upon their parents' death. He married Cate, the mother of two young daughters, Hannah and Rachael. Together, they had six more children.

By the mid-1790s, Jefferson moved the family to Poplar Forest and James became headman, overseeing field laborers. This position allowed him more autonomy

and better living conditions than other slaves, and demanded that he enforce rules and discipline within the community. In his later years, Hubbard became the hogkeeper.

James Hubbard lived to be a great-grandfather. His children's lives reflect the range of experiences common among slaves. Nace became headman and Hannah became Jefferson's housekeeper. Nancy died as a teenager, and Joan was given away as part of Martha Jefferson's dowry. James, who shared his father's name, became a habitual runaway and Jefferson sold him.

James remained at Poplar Forest with his wife until his death, sometime between 1820 and 1826.

*Negroes in Bedford  
July 1805.  
Jame Hubbard  
Cate, ab. 1747.  
Armistead. 71.  
Nace. 73.  
Sarah. 88. Aug. . . .  
Nancy 91. Sep. Oct. 05  
Rachael. Oct. 73.  
Dorrel. 94. & 1808  
Cate. 97. Aug.  
Joe. 1801.  
Lania. 1805*

*Maria. 76.  
Nace 96. Aug.  
Nisq. 99.  
Johnny 1804. Sep.*

*Eve. 79.  
Sameo. 97. Mar.*







## HANNAH

Born in 1770 at Monticello, Hannah moved with her family to Poplar Forest as a teenager. There she met and married Solomon. Like others who married within the plantation community, Hannah established a new household with her husband. Jefferson likely rewarded the couple with a pot and a bed.

The fate of Solomon is unclear, but he was no longer living at Poplar Forest by the mid-1790s. He left behind his wife and three young children. By 1810, Hannah married Hall, a plantation blacksmith and hogkeeper. The couple lived together with her five younger children. Hannah's last child was born in 1812.

At first, Hannah worked in the fields. By 1811, she served as Jefferson's housekeeper, preparing the house for his visits, cooking and washing for him, and greeting visitors

in his absence. She most likely lived in the dependency wing when Jefferson and his family were in residence.

Hannah could read and write, skills that she probably shared with other slaves. A single surviving letter written in 1818 from Hannah to Jefferson describes the state of the house and sends wishes for his health. She also expressed her Christian faith in the letter, one of the few hints that survive of the spiritual beliefs of people living at Poplar Forest.

Hannah's life is last recorded in an 1821 provision list. Whether she lived beyond the sale of her son William and the breakup of the community following Jefferson's death in 1826 is unclear. Jefferson's grandson Francis Eppes acquired at least three of her sons and took them with him to Florida.

## WILLIAM (BILLY)

William was born at Poplar Forest in 1799. Unlike his grandfather, James, and mother, Hannah, he rebelled violently against slavery. In 1812, Jefferson sent him to Monticello to learn a trade.

William showed promise as a craftsman but by age 18 had a bad reputation. In late 1817 Jefferson removed him from the supervision of enslaved master carpenter John Hemmings, assigning him to make barrels. Within two months, having proved to "be so ungovernable and idle" that he could no longer remain in the cooper's shop, William was sent back to Poplar Forest to work in the fields.

In the fall of 1819, he attacked a Poplar Forest overseer. The man was not seriously hurt but following the attack, William ran away to Monticello to argue his case.

Jefferson's farm manager urged him to dispose of the young man. How or if Jefferson punished William is not known, but William was sent back to Poplar Forest.

Three years later, William and two others were arrested and tried for attacking another Poplar Forest overseer and for conspiracy to rebel. William was convicted of the first charge, and sentenced to be burned on the hand and publicly whipped. The others were acquitted due to insufficient evidence. Following the trial, Jefferson sent the three men, along with a fourth slave believed to have taken part in the attack, to Louisiana to be sold. He hoped this would deter other slaves from rebellious behavior. By early 1824, William had again run away and when caught in New Orleans was sold.

**More information about Poplar Forest can be found in the guidebook *Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest: A Private Place*. Merchandise is available in the Museum Shop or online at [poplarforest.org/shop](http://poplarforest.org/shop).**

## VISITOR INFORMATION

### Backpacks

No bags or backpacks may be carried on a visitor's back during house tours.

### Photography

Photography and videography are not permitted inside the house. Still photography and video recording for *personal use only* are permitted on the grounds.

### Smoking

Smoking is prohibited in all buildings and on the grounds of Poplar Forest. A designated smoking area is located near the visitor parking area.

### Pets

Pets are welcome on the grounds at Poplar Forest. Pets must be leashed at all times and are not allowed (excluding service animals) in any buildings. Please clean up after your pet.

### Food and Drink

Picnic tables are available on site. Food, drink and chewing gum are not permitted in the house.

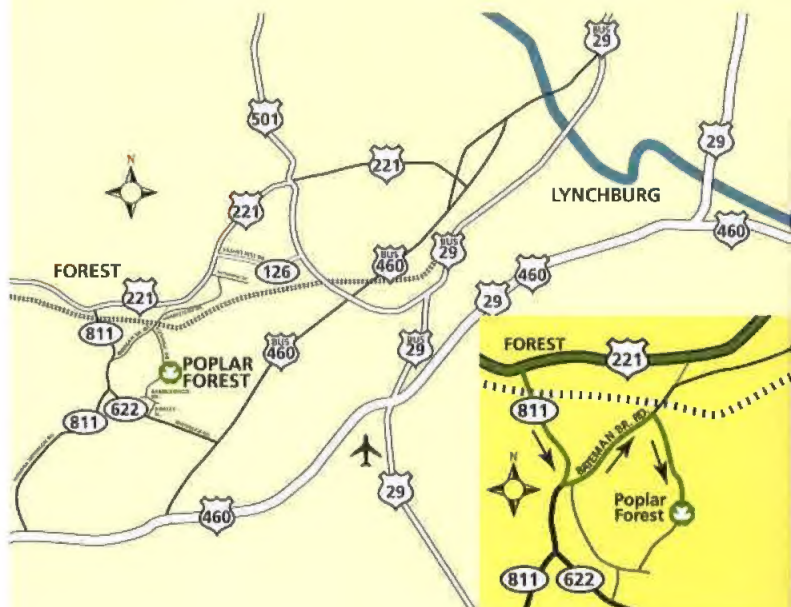
### Cell Phones

Please turn off or silence cell phones while touring the house.

### Restrooms

Restrooms are located adjacent to the museum shop and are handicapped accessible.

Poplar Forest was Thomas Jefferson's well-kept secret, nearly lost to history. The nonprofit Corporation for Jefferson's Poplar Forest was formed in 1983 by a group of individuals to lead the ongoing rescue and restoration of Poplar Forest for the cultural and educational benefit of the public.



*Approximate driving time to Poplar Forest from*

Washington DC	4 hours
Richmond	2 hours
Blue Ridge Parkway	30 minutes
Lynchburg	15 minutes

### Group tours

for 20 or more individuals are available year-round, by appointment.

### Hours

Guided tours seven days a week  
mid-March through  
December 30  
10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Closed Easter, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Also open for "Winter Weekends" from mid-January to mid-March from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.



THOMAS JEFFERSON'S  
*Poplar Forest*

P.O. Box 419 | Forest, VA 24551 | 434.525.1806

[poplarforest.org](http://poplarforest.org)

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